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HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES FISH ADVISORY ON DAN RIVER

(Richmond, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health announced today an advisory for flathead and channel catfish in a 42-mile stretch of the Dan River in Southside Virginia from the Kerr Reservoir at Staunton River State Park to southwestern Halifax County where the river crosses into North Carolina, north of Virginia Route 62.

The advisory is based on new information from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on the levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) found in recent samples of eight fish species taken in the South Boston, Va., area.

Flathead and channel catfish were the only species determined to have levels of PCB contamination above 600 parts per billion (ppb), the health department's level of concern. Samples of flathead catfish were found to have PCB levels ranging from 271 ppb to 2,689 ppb, while channel catfish samples were found to range from 62 ppb to 648 ppb.

Additional fish samples taken from other parts of the Dan River and its tributaries are being analyzed, according to Ram K. Tripathi, Ph.D., Toxicologist in the Division of Health Hazards Control. "The health department will review these results and will advise the public as needed. We also will work with DEQ as the source of the PCB contamination is located," Tripathi said.

The health advisory cautions people to eat no more than two eight-ounce meals a month of flathead and channel catfish taken from the advisory area. Pregnant women and children are advised not to eat any of these fish. Advisory signs will be posted along the affected section of the river.

The health department's meal estimates are based on the possibility that eating PCB-contaminated fish may pose a risk to human health, Tripathi said.

PCBs are a group of man-made industrial chemicals that exist as a mixture and may contain up to 209 individual compounds. Since 1977, PCBs have not been produced in the U.S., but they are still found in the environment. PCBs were once widely used as coolants and lubricants in transformers, capacitors and other electrical equipment.

Tripathi said the health department recommends the following preparation precautions to reduce any potential harmful effects:

(more)

- Eat the smaller, younger fish (within the legal limits). They are less likely to contain harmful levels of PCBs than larger, older fish.
- Remove the skin, fat (from the belly and top of the fish) and internal organs where PCBs are most likely to accumulate before cooking the fish.
- Bake, broil or grill on an open rack to allow fats to drain away from the meat.
- Discard the fats that cook out of the fish.
- Avoid or reduce the amount of fish drippings or broth that are used to flavor the meal. These drippings may contain higher levels of PCBs.
- Eat less deep fried fish, since frying seals PCBs into the fatty tissue.

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